

PROPERTY OF
NORTHEASTERN BIBLE INSTITUTE LIBRARY.
ESSEX FELS, NEW JERSEY

M. J. Thompson

LIBRARY
NORTHEASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE
ESSEX FELLS, N. J. 07021

**GUIDANCE THROUGH
LIFE'S CONTRADICTIONS**

BOOKS AND BOOKLETS

BY

DR. SHELTON

BOOKS

HEROES OF THE CROSS IN AMERICA

RAISING THE AVERAGE

CHAPTERS ON OUR LORD'S FAITHFULNESS. I

BETTER THAN GOLD

BOOKLETS

PERSONAL WORK AND THE PERSONAL WORKER

HIGHER IDEALS OF CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

MY MOTHER

THE PUBLIC USE OF THE BIBLE

THE GREATEST OF BOOKS

THE PRAYER THAT CHANGES THINGS

THE KILLING SIN

WHAT A MAN SAW AND FELT IN HELL

THE BIBLE AND MODERN CIVILIZATION

AGGRESSIVE EVANGELISM AND THE CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALS

248.86
Sh 449

GUIDANCE THROUGH LIFE'S CONTRADICTIONS

BY

DON O. SHELTON, LL.D.

President of the National Bible Institute

New York



THE MASTER'S COLLEGE
FOWELL LIBRARY
SANTA CLARITA, CA 91321

NEW YORK

THE NATIONAL BIBLE INSTITUTE

1927

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

PROPERTY OF
NORTHEASTERN BIBLE INSTITUTE LIBRARY
ESSEX FELLS, NEW JERSEY

COPYRIGHT, 1927,
BY THE
NATIONAL BIBLE INSTITUTE
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

TO
MY WIFE

PREFACE

These messages are intended for those whose faith is being tested by sorrows, by disappointments, by disillusionments, or by other adverse circumstances.

As suffering, in some form, is the lot of all, it is a reason for constant thanksgiving that our Lord gives the light of His Word and the power of His Spirit to guide and uphold all who receive Him by faith and who seek, by His grace, to know and to do His will. *“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”*

Amid all of life's vicissitudes the Christian believer has the privilege

PREFACE

of possessing, as an imperishable gift, the peace and the joy of the Lord. *"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.....Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.....These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."*

It is hoped that all who read these pages and who are passing through trials of any kind, may find herein some guiding and consoling word that will quicken faith, sustain courage and lead to spiritual renewal.

CONTENTS

Page

I. GUIDANCE THROUGH LIFE'S CONTRA- DICTIONS	3 6
II. THE CROOK IN THE LOT	37
III. ✓ GOING THROUGH FIERY TRIALS	65
IV. IRON GATES	85
V. DIRECTED STEPS	103
VI. THREE STRONG ALLIES	121
VII. ✕ SPIRITUAL RENEWAL	136

I

GUIDANCE THROUGH LIFE'S CONTRADICTIONS

How many contradictions there are in every life-experience! A healthy child in a home of plenty is suddenly stricken and taken to be with the Lord, while an invalid, bed-ridden child, in a home of poverty, is left. A vigilant, influential preacher of the Gospel is taken in the midst of his widely useful life-work, and a dissolute libertine remains until old age.

Tens of millions of dollars are poured out for causes of secondary importance and little amounts are doled out for the most essential work in the world—the preaching of

the everlasting, fathomless Gospel of Christ. Three-fourths of one cent a year for each dollar of their income is the record of the American people for the support of the Christian church at home and abroad! Yet the United States is still called a Christian nation!

A prayerful, sincere, earnest, highly-useful Christian suffers repeated hardships and afflictions, while a selfish, licentious, worldly-minded man goes through life painlessly and nonchalantly!

All these contradictions, and a multitude of others, we face.

And what contradictions we find in ourselves! Truly has a Christian teacher exclaimed: "What strange opposites, never reconciled, even in the saintliest of men! In every one of us a little window opening on to the azure of the sky! In every one

of us a little window opening on to the darkness of the pit!"

I.

Some of life's contradictions are pictured in the Bible. In Psalm 66 are portrayed many severe trials with which God tested Israel. The record is a startling one. They were promised guidance into Canaan. But on their way they were compelled to meet enemies and tribulations; the Red Sea, hunger and thirst; fiery serpents, fire and pestilence, Amalekites and the Midianites, enemies on the right hand and on the left. This Psalm asserts their trials: "*For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.*"

In the Book of Genesis we see Jacob, to whom great promises were made. He was told that he would

prevail with God. He did prevail with God. Yet what frequent contradictions sprang up in his life. *"Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight. And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place."*

Laban had been in pursuit of Jacob as an enemy! But the Lord dealt with that contradictory experience in Jacob's life so that Jacob

went on his way and the angels of God met him. Nevertheless, contradictions followed him all through his earthly pilgrimage.

Then we come to the career of Joseph. In order to understand the Old Testament characters we have to try to put ourselves in their places, and as we study the character of Joseph and put ourselves in his place, we come to the conclusion that he suffered about as many of life's contradictions as did any servant of the Lord portrayed in the Old Testament.

Joseph's strenuous and marvelous course shows the power of God to guide a servant of His through a maze of alarming and contradictory circumstances. *"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: the archers have sorely*

grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel)."

Jacob, who met all the tribulations and contradictions which we have referred to, is speaking about his son Joseph in these verses. Turning back in Genesis to the record of Joseph's career we see how severely he was tested: "*And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan. And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold this dreamer cometh.*

Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams."

Here was a true, happy servant of God, and his own brethren were putting bitter obstacles in his way. The archers were ready to attack him. They were lying in wait, intent upon his destruction. And Jacob said: "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him and hated him." "And they took him (Joseph), and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.....Then there passed by Midianites, merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt."

How baffling a contradiction was this—his own brethren selling him into the hands of foreigners! Surely the archers sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him. *“Come now therefore, and let us slay him,”* said his brothers, with hatred in their hearts.

How vividly the surprising turns in Joseph’s career are described! And through them all the hand of God was guiding his faithful servant: *“His bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel;) even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb:*

the blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren."

How contradictory also were the experiences of Elijah! His prayer-life was typical of that of God's servants in all ages. He had been told that rain would come. He had been assured that his prayer had prevailed. But contradictions came in. Elijah sent out his servant to look at the sky. You would have thought, would you not, that the Lord would at the first have given him encouragement? But the servant came back and said, "*There is nothing.*"

We, too, have had similar contradictions. We have been sure that

the Lord was about to fulfil some promise we had been pleading in order that some great need in our lives might be met. But "there was nothing."

Elijah's young man was sent again and again, and came back with an adverse report. There were seven contradictions apparently before the rain fell and God answered his prayer! The evidence was against Elijah. The facts contradicted his faith. There were no confirming signs. We, too, often find that between God's promises and their fulfilment there are many contradictory signs. But we have also found that His delays are not necessarily His denials. Through His delays we are often led to relay with greater care the track of our faith.

Consider our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is Palm Sunday. Hear

the cheers! Listen to the Hosannas! See the waving palms! Then witness Gethsemane! Then go to Calvary! Behold the world's redemption! What marvelous contradictions are wrapped up in these few sentences!

Other temporary contradictions are portrayed in the New Testament. The blind man's faith was vigorously exercised before he was healed. What a ridiculous figure he must have been with mud on his face! Possibly he was tempted to complain and say: "Jesus, in working my cure, might have spared me this humiliation. If He could heal me at all He would have done so at once. This queer errand on which He has sent me contradicts all that I expected." But as he went, and washed, as Jesus had told him to do, his blindness disappeared.

How numerous the contradictions were in the life of Paul! His shipwreck experience was crowded with apparent contradictions. He had been assured that he would arrive safely. Then came the hurricane. For fourteen days they were driven by fierce gales. When they came near to what they thought was a landing-place they found it to be a rock-bound coast. Later the sailors mutinied and refused to go on. Then came the shipwreck. Afterward broken planks and boards and safety!

II.

Some of life's contradictions are portrayed in the experiences of Christian saints and heroes. There was William Carey! Long years of prayer preceded his going to India. At last he started. When he

reached India, the man who had gone with him, his treasurer, proved incompetent. After Carey had been in India a short time his money gave out through the inefficiency of this trusted associate. We can imagine what William Carey in a foreign land endured when he found that his fellow-missionary had deceived him.

The missionary career of Hudson Taylor was also crowded with contradictions. He prayed that he might evangelize interior China. He believed God had answered his prayers. With a company of missionaries he was on his way to China. The sailors, said to have been a godless crew, observed their missionary passengers. Mr. Taylor and his associates were intent on soul-winning. In answer to united prayer the second officer, when the ship was twenty-five days out, pro-

fessed conversion. A little later several others of the ship's crew were awakened and converted. Among these was the first mate, a fierce bully. Evangelistic meetings held daily were attended by the crew. Suddenly the revival fires died down. They were quenched by the missionaries themselves! Among them criticisms and jealousies existed. Those who had been preaching to the sailors and were going to preach the Gospel to the Chinese were themselves wrong with God and with their fellow-men! This was indeed a serious contradiction for Hudson Taylor to face.

When, after much prayer, this grave difficulty was overcome, a terrific storm arose. So severe was the tempest that the probability of their reaching China was doubted. Those inexperienced in the ways of our

Lord's dealings with His servants would have thought that this chosen messenger, being sent to evangelize a great nation, would have been freed from danger and anxiety and from Satan's assaults. On the contrary, he was led forward in a course marked by constant testings of faith.

One of Scotland's most influential ministers was Robert Murray McCheyne. He was remarkable for his saintliness of character and for the spiritual power that attended his ministry. His presence was a benediction. His Spirit-filled ministry is still a fragrant memory in the Scottish churches. Mr. McCheyne was on a tour for the purpose of enlisting interest in missions. At one of the places visited he was entertained in the home of the minister. He stepped out into the yard where

there was a gymnastic appliance, and, as he was an athlete, he lifted himself up on the bars but slipped and fell and so injured himself that he never recovered. In a few months God took him to Himself. Standing in his pulpit at Dundee, and thinking of the marvelous fact that though Mr. McCheyne had been dead more than seventy-five years, his influence is still felt throughout Scotland and to the ends of the earth where the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel are loved, the strange providence which removed him from his ministry at thirty-three years of age seemed more mysterious than ever. The life of Mr. McCheyne, written by Dr. Bonar, is one of the richest and most rewarding biographies the church possesses. How contradictory, from the human point of view, was

the way the Lord chose to deal with His servant!

In our experiences in the work of the National Bible Institute there have been numerous contradictions. A few years ago a member of our Board of Directors became ill. He went unexpectedly to a sanitarium at Clifton Springs. Apprised that he could not recover, he wrote a message to me on a postal card in a trembling hand, asking whether we would issue to him two Annuity Bonds of \$10,000 each. His card reached us in the first morning mail. Before an answer could be sent, we received word that our good and generous friend had died during the preceding night.

Another good friend used to attend our Sunday Afternoon Bible Hour services, when we were in Thirty-fifth Street. He consulted

with me several times about making a large gift to the Institute. He owned an apartment house, valued at about \$60,000. There was a mortgage on it and as we did not think we ought to assume the mortgage, we did not encourage his gift of the property. Later (on Wednesday) he called at the office and left word that he had entirely paid off the mortgage and was ready to donate the apartment to the Institute free of indebtedness. On Friday he became ill and on the following day went to the hospital. He lived but two days and his proposed liberal gift was never received.

Evangeline Booth of the Salvation Army awoke at midnight and found herself prostrated and helpless. Her little dog was lying at her bedside. She put out her hand and called in a whisper: "Mazie!" In-

stantly the little dog jumped up, and she whispered: "Mazie, go and tell Giddie (her nurse, who was sleeping in an adjoining room) that I want her." Instantly the little dog bounded out of the room into the room adjoining and jumped on the nurse's bed. Miss Booth heard the nurse say to the dog, "Be quiet. Go away!" But the dog would not go away until the nurse arose and went into the next room. There she found Miss Booth in a serious condition. A physician was called and was able to revive her. When she was restored the physician said that she unquestionably owed her life to the little dog because he did not know what would have happened to her if she had remained as she was ten minutes longer. Who led some one to give that intelligent dog to Miss Booth? Who was it that knew

that that critical moment was coming? Whose prevision wrought her deliverance?

III.

How does the Bible explain life's contradictions? *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!.....For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever."* *"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."*

In that tonic chapter, the eleventh of Hebrews, which always brings new strength and encouragement to Christian disciples, some of life's contradictions are enumerated: *"And what shall I more say? for*

the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goat-

skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth; and these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise."

The life experiences of these old-time servants of the Lord teach us that through permitted contradictions the life of the Christian is enriched and his efficiency and fruitfulness is enhanced. Paul said that his imprisonment had resulted in enabling him to reach the entire praetorian guard with the Gospel. *"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel."*

Sometimes, however, our life's contradictions are for our chastening and discipline and correction, as well as for our widened usefulness.

A short time ago we stood beside the tomb of the famous professor and preacher of St. Andrews, Scotland, Thomas Halyburton. He had advanced far in Christlikeness of life but he said that sometimes he would see his former sin clearly written all over his present punishment. By the side of Halyburton's tomb at St. Andrews is that of his world-famous predecessor, Samuel Rutherford. He also lived through many of life's contradictions. Out of his multitudinous cross-bearings sprang his classical "Letters," which overflow with comfort for all who are tried and bereaved. "If you take up your cross handsomely, and frankly, and, above all, believingly,"

he says, "your heaviest cross will become such' a burden to you as its wings are to a bird, and as its sails are to a ship."

Yet our Lord's chastisements are tempered with mercy! This truth John Milton had learned when, in his blindness, he wrote:

"O merciful One!

*When men are farthest, then Thou
art most near;*

*When men pass coldly by, my weak-
ness shun,*

Thy chariot I hear.

"Thy glorious face

*Is leaning toward me, and its holy
light*

*Shines upon my lowly dwelling
place,*

And there is no more night.

*“On bended knee
I recognize thy purpose clearly
shown;
My vision Thou hast dimmed that I
might see
Thyself—Thyself alone.
“I have naught to fear.
This darkness is a shadow of Thy
wing;
Beneath it I am almost sacred; here
Can come no evil thing.”*

Whatever our cross, we may be sure that our Lord permits it to be laid upon us for our sanctification and for our increased fruitfulness in His service. Back of every trial which God permits to come to us, though hidden from our view, is His wisdom and His love. In His unerring sight our trials are necessary for our growth in holiness and usefulness.

IV.

There is a way to sure guidance through life's contradictions. "*And Jesus said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*" The translation of this verse by Weymouth accentuates its significance: "*And he said to all, 'If any one is desirous of following me, let him ignore self and take up his cross day by day, and so be my follower.'*" Therefore, amid all of life's contradictions the Christian believer should seek to ignore self, take up his cross daily and follow Christ obediently. Those who keep their thought centered on the Lord; who keep their eyes off of the things that are causing trouble; who, in all their circumstances, look to the Lord alone and deal with Him alone,

find that their life's contradictions yield manifold blessings.

All of life's contradictions are to be met believingly. If Joseph and Paul had not persevered in faith, their outstanding and influential personalities would not adorn the pages of Scripture. The life of every Christian is crowded with events and experiences opposite to the will of God. When these trials are met with trust in God, then ere long the Christian believer is enabled to sing songs of deliverance.

Many of our severest trials come through other persons. We shall act wisely if we do not center our thought on these individuals, thinking of them as agents of evil, but instead believe that through them God Himself is laying our cross upon us for our good. If some other personality is irritating us or seems to be

an obstacle in our path, we shall act wisely if we place our trust in the Lord and turn away from the individual who seems to be a hindrance and believe that God permits our particular crosses for our own good.

Scotland's preëminent preacher, Alexander Whyte, of Edinburgh, upon whom were laid heavy and numerous crosses and who in his early years met some of life's bitterest contradictions, urged his congregation to exercise their imagination upon their cross and upon all the circumstances thereof. "For one thing," he said, "imagine yourself in your offensive neighbor's place. Put yourself inside the mind, and inside the heart, and inside the history, and inside all the circumstances of the man who is such a cross to you. For, depend upon it, we are all as great crosses to other people as they

are to us. Not seldom, when we are tossing upon our bed with pain, and with rage, and with rebellion, the very person we are accusing and cursing before God, is at that same moment, just through the wall, wrestling with God either to cut his life short or ours, because he can endure us no longer. Now to imagine that, and to believe that, is true wisdom. To imagine that, and to believe that, will make you humble, and contrite, and patient, and kind, and forgiving. He is a hopeless fool who goes on all his life thinking and saying and praying that he is the only injured man, and the only insulted man, and the only despised man, and the only cross-bearing man in all the household, in all the congregation, and in all the community. Yes, I say again: you should overhear all your neighbor's complaints

and prayers to God a b o u t you. And then there is this: it is quite possible that it may be the very best thing about you that makes you such a cross to some other man. And if that is your case just imagine yourself back in that house in which Jesus of Nazareth was born and brought up. Jesus Christ Himself was a constant cross to His brothers and His sisters at home; and He knew it, and He bowed His head, and accepted it. First His doctrine, and then His manner of life made them all miserable at home. I will not say that they made Him miserable in return; but they often made Him very sad. For by their cruel treatment of His doctrine and of Himself, they laid a far heavier cross upon His broken heart than ever Pilate laid upon His bleeding back. Return, in imagina-

tion, to all that, and it will help to make you more humble, and more meek, and more considerate, and more patient, till at last you are made absolutely like your Lord."

When another person deceives us, let us ask searchingly, Is there any self-deceit in my own heart? Am I in thought and word and deed all that God would have me to be and all that my fellow-men think me to be?

When another misrepresents us, let us inquire sincerely, Do I, by my speech and life, misrepresent the Saviour, whom I profess to love and serve?

The secret of sure guidance is to maintain, by obedience to God's will in all things, our fellowship with Him, and a close walk with Him. Adverse circumstances are never a controlling factor in the life of one

who walks in the light, as Christ is in the light.

V.

There is a goal, toward which, through all of life's contradictions, the sincere Christian moves. Contradictions are like the mirage on the desert—they are misleading lights.

The Christian believes that present circumstances, whether adverse or favorable, are stepping-stones leading upward in the path that God has prepared. *"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."* *"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt*

not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

In the wondrous sixty-sixth Psalm we read in verse 9, "*.....and suffereth not our feet to be moved.*" Their life was preserved and also their position. Satan was unable to make them stumble. God helped them to stand firm. Verse 12 presents a vivid picture—the deliverer, "*Thou.*" The deliverance—"from their enemies." The delivered—"themselves." The final outcome—"happiness." BUT—"but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." Their Lord, the Lord God Almighty—though men rode over their heads, though they went through fire and through water—the Lord God Almighty brought them out into a place of happiness.

And if our own circumstances seem to be against us; if we have

great needs; if we are passing through severe trials and tribulations, let us remember that our loving Heavenly Father puts into our life-program the same cheering and significant "BUT." In spite of all that opposes the progress of the Christian's program, if he maintains by faith and obedience his fellowship with his Lord, he will be led in a safe path. *"I will never, never let go thy hand."*

II

THE CROOK IN THE LOT

ONE of the choicest servants of the Lord in Scotland, Thomas Boston, who was born at Dunse, in 1676 and who died in 1732, wrote a sermon on the words: "*Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?*" It remains a living message.

The only right view of trials and afflictions is the view given in the Scripture. The crook in the lot, as Boston pointed out, "is that certain train or course of events, by the providence of God, falling to every one of us in this world; and that is our lot, being allotted to us by the

Sovereign God, our Creator and Governor.”

In Scripture the crook in the lot is frequently illustrated. Job experienced things that were unpleasant, that were hard to bear. *“While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest*

brother's house: and, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee." Thus Job had the crook put in his lot.

Asaph also knew what it was to meet bitter trials. "*Verily,*" he says, "*I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me.*" The things that happened to him were hard to bear and he could not explain them until he went into the sanctuary of God.

Joseph had the crook put into his lot in his youth. Jacob met his crook in middle life and Peter in old

age. Our Saviour had the crook in His lot all His days.

Thomas Boston said that "the crook in the lot falls on the tender part, that part in the lot where one is least able to bear it or at least thinks it is so." The Psalmist says, "*For it was not an enemy that reproached me* (the crook was beginning to come in his lot); *then I could have borne it.*" His crook was the unfortunate treatment he received from a friend. "*Neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.*" He it was—his close personal friend—who put the crook into the lot of the Psalmist. He could have borne his trial if it had been an enemy who had assaulted him, but it was his

own familiar friend who gave the thrust which worked havoc in his soul.

As the crook in the lot "is the special trial appointed for every one, it is altogether reasonable and becoming the wisdom of God that it falls on that which, of all things, doth most rival God." The Psalmist's trial may have been that this particular friend who was turning against him was one who was usurping God's place in his life.

As we go through Scripture we find that the outstanding characters had a crook put into their lives. Jacob lost Rachel by death, and Joseph by treachery. Job's lot had a crook in it through an ill-natured wife. Abigail's crook was made by a bad-tempered husband. Eli had to bear a heavy cross through the meanness of his children. They

turned against their father. *"Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion? And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David."*

David was slandered and held in contempt. He said: *"I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance: they that did see me without fled from me. I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel. For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life."*

Paul's physical appearance was unattractive. That was a crook in his lot. *"For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."* Timothy's crook was a weak body. Therefore Paul suggested that he *"drink no longer water, but use a little wine for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities."*

Thus we see that God, in His dealings with His children through the ages, has permitted a crook to come into their lives. And in the Christian Church we see that it still is the Lord's way to permit frequently in the life of His children that which tests their faith and throws them back entirely on Himself.

A letter which Rowland Hill, one of the most celebrated preachers of his time, wrote to John Wesley

shows that even the most eminent servants of the Lord are not exempt from painful crooks. Rowland Hill was a young man comparatively, about thirty-three years of age; John Wesley was seventy-four, and yet Rowland Hill wrote one of the most caustic attacks that a minister's pen ever indited in seeking to malign and ridicule a distinguished servant of the Lord. Wesley was the most outstanding Christian in the age in which he lived. In season and out of season, for half a century, he had been seeking to lift up Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He was one of the most faithful and self-sacrificing servants of the Lord of all ages. Yet Rowland Hill wrote about him as follows: "Erase half a dozen lines, and I defy any one to discover whether the lying apostle of the Foundry be a Jew, a Papist,

a Pagan, or a Turk." "The dictatorial Mr. John lyingly maintains argument enough for the gaping dupes whom he leads by the nose." "He and his lay lubbers go forth to poison the minds of men." "Wesley's ragged legion of preaching tinkers, scavengers, draymen, and chimney-sweepers." "His own people say, 'He is a very poor preacher'; and that most of his laymen, raw and ignorant as they are, preach much more to the purpose." "Why do they not keep the shatter-brained old gentleman locked up in a garret?" "The venomous quill of this greyheaded enemy of all righteousness." "The most rancorous pretences that ever actuated the prostituted pen of a venal profligate." "His sole perfection consists in perfect hatred of all goodness and all good men."

Why did God permit Rowland Hill, one of the leading clergymen of the Church of England, to send a document containing such false, vitriolic sentences into the places where Wesley had been preaching the Gospel so faithfully? In his old age this was one of the crooks in Wesley's lot.

And every one has some crook in his lot. *"I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered."*

I.

Our crook is a test whereby we discover whether we are really Christians or not. Job's trial showed what Job was. *"Hast thou*

considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Has not thou made an hedge a b o u t him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." Satan said, Have you not been protecting Job and making it possible for him to declare himself Thy servant? God permitted the crook to come into Job's life in order that his real character might be revealed. *"And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none*

like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movest me against him, to destroy him without cause. And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life." And then nearly all of Job's friends tried to prove that he was a hypocrite. The Lord permitted the crook to come into his life that his true character might be discovered.

Into the rich young ruler's life the Lord put a crook and his character was quickly revealed. The young man said to our Saviour: "Good

Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him (our Lord was putting the crook into his life), One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up thy cross, and follow me." And what was his attitude toward his crook? "*And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions."* He went away with the crook in his lot.

So our crook—that thing that is hard to bear, reveals our real character. It discovers whether we are or are not true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

II.

Our crook is a means of helping us to withdraw our affection from the

things of this world and to set them on things above, where Christ is. The prodigal son's crook turned him away from the swine and toward his father's house. The crook, as Boston quaintly puts it, "makes them errands to God which they had not before." If it were not for our sharp trials, how many of us would forget God! Our crook keeps the way open between ourselves and Him and impels us to seek His presence.

III.

Our crook helps to bring conviction of sin. Again Thomas Boston says, "As when one, walking heedlessly, is suddenly taken ill of a lameness; his going halting the rest of the way convinceth him of having made a wrong step; and every new painful step brings it afresh to his mind: so God makes a crook in

one's lot to convince him of some false step he hath made, or course he hath taken." That was the case with Joseph's brethren. *"They said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us."* The crook in their lot brought back their sin to them and showed them where they were wrong.

The crook brings home to the mind and heart the reality and the greatness of sin. This is shown also in Jacob's life. Leah had been given to him by Laban, instead of Rachel. He would remember his cheating of his own father years before. He deceived his father by putting his younger son in the place of the older; and then Laban deceived him

by imposing upon him the elder sister for the younger.

IV.

Through our crook sin is punished and oftentimes corrected. *"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee."* David killed Uriah, and what happened? The sword never departed from his house.

Gehazi very easily and quickly took two bags of money from Naaman, by lying, but acquired a leprosy which stayed with him for life. "One may have confessed and sincerely repented of that sin," said Boston, "which yet shall make him go halting to the grave, though it cannot carry him to hell." Sometimes the crook is a punishment for sin and it is sometimes a means for the correction of sin.

V.

Often our crook prevents sin. “I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall.” Sometimes our heavenly Father in His love and mercy makes it impossible for us to go the way we had intended, thereby preventing downfall and defeat. The crook, the trying experience that is so disappointing, is in reality a disguised blessing which prevents our going contrary to the will of God. If the crook were taken out of the lot of some men, they would quickly plunge into sin.

VI.

Our crook quickens our spiritual life. It leads to an exercise of faith; to a life of prayer. A friend said, “It is a singular thing, but very few organizations giving themselves to the proclamation of the Gospel seem

to maintain their power and usefulness unless their way is rough and difficult. When there comes a sufficiency of money and facilities there is often a steady decline of spiritual power. When our way is arduous and we only see a step at a time, then we keep the path between ourselves and the Lord well trodden."

Our crook, if we receive it in the right way, will lead us constantly to exercise faith in God. There is a great awakening force in a crook. This truth Peter declares: "*Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be*

tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

The trial of our faith, if we take it in the right way, will in the end be found to the glory of God. Remember Abraham! Think of his marvelous faith. God promised to make of him a great nation. But He also gave Abraham a crook. He had to leave his country, and his kindred, and go among the Canaanites. *"And he went out, not knowing whither he went."* All along his earthly pathway he was compelled to exercise faith.

Remember Moses. We say of him that he was the meekest of men. How did God keep him meek? By taking difficulties and hardship out of his lot? By putting a crook into his life. He gave him the task of leading "the most perverse and un-

manageable people" that any man ever had to lead. "The crook in his lot plainly was designed for the exercise of his meekness." God wanted him to be meek and He kept him meek by giving him an obstinate, self-willed people to lead. In his difficult task Moses was not permitted to forget that he needed God's help continually.

VII.

Priceless are the messages suggested by the consideration of this vital subject.

We should look on our crook as of God's making, or as of His permission. Have we some hard, bitter thing that is with us every day we live; something we cannot understand, some trial that greets us with the morning light and keeps step with us through the day?

We should deal with God alone in regard to our crook. *“For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”* We should not fix our attention on anything intermediary. We should not follow the habit of the dog that snarls at the stone thrown at him and not at the hand that threw the stone. If some one writes a pamphlet against us, as Rowland Hill did against John Wesley, let us look back of the pamphlet to God and try to find the lesson He would teach us. We ought not to look at the individual who criticizes us or injures us, but to God, and ask Him to show us what it is He wishes to teach us through His permission of our trial. We should ever try to see God’s hand in our crook. This will make it easier for us to bear it.

We ought not to murmur against our crook. Rather let us cheerfully recognize God's hand in it. "*And Samuel told him (Eli) every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.*" Eli did not look to the servant who had brought him the news, but he looked to God. In Jude 16 reference is made to those who complain of their lot. "*These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.*" Let us not rebel against our crook. The Israelites murmured against Moses, but God said they murmured against Himself. Let us trace our crook then, whatever it may be, back to the will of God.

We should seek to find out the design, the purpose of our crook, asking, Why does God permit it? God having made it or permitted it, it is for our good. The crooks in our lot help to keep us humbly dependent upon God; they lead us to be more persistently prayerful; and they constantly remind us that we must by faith maintain our union with our Lord.

“If Thou hadst not been stern with

me

But hadst left me free,
I had forgot myself and Thee;
For sin's so sweet
That minds ill-bent
Seldom repent
Until they meet their punishment.”

Let us by prayer and by searching the Scriptures seek to find out the

design of the crook God has made or has permitted. Every one who is a true disciple of Jesus Christ may be sure his crook is for his good. God loves us and therefore the crook He permits in our life is in some way an expression of His love.

God alone can straighten our crook. There is nothing too hard for Him. *"I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living."*

We may be sure that if it is for our good God will straighten our crook at the right time. *"The LORD God is a Sun and Shield, the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly."* God in His

wisdom and power can take our crook away when in His love He sees it is best for us that it should be taken away.

If we are submissive under our crook it will prove a blessing. "*Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now I have kept thy word.*" Dr. Talmage of Brooklyn said the greatest opportunities in his life had been opened to him by his enemies. If we rightly use our crook, it will yield a golden harvest of character and achievement.

Let John Wesley stand as an example. He did not permit Rowland Hill's vituperative letter to unnerve him or to quench his Christian courtesy and love. This was the way he took this particular crook: "I read the truly wonderful performance of Mr. Rowland Hill. I stood amazed! Compared to him, Mr. Toplady him-

self is a very civil, fair-spoken gentleman.” The next day he said in his journal: “I wrote an answer to it. ‘Not rendering railing for railing’ (I have not so learned Christ); but ‘speaking the truth in love.’” That was the way Wesley dealt with his crook. He uttered no harsh or venomous word. Though the sword of Rowland Hill’s animosity pierced his heart, he did not strike back. “I would have thought,” he said, “that Rowland Hill would have had some respect for my gray hairs.” In this Christ-like response how greatly Wesley honored his Lord! His conduct under this bitter trial is an enduring testimony to the strength and nobility of his Christian character. His pen moved at the impulse of gentleness and love.

It is our privilege to pray for the removal of our crook as soon as it has accomplished the Lord's will. "*Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.*" Until God removes our crook, grace will be given us to bear up under it. When Paul urgently desired that the crook should be taken out of his life, the Lord said to him, "I am not going to take it away, I am going to give you grace to bear it."

"How gentle God's commands,
How kind His precepts are!
Come, cast your burdens on the
Lord,
And trust His constant care.

"While Providence supports,
Let saints securely dwell;
That hand, which bears all nature
up,
Shall guide His children well.

“Why should this anxious load
Press down your weary mind?
Haste to your heavenly Father’s
throne,
And sweet refreshment find.

“His goodness stands approved,
Down to the present day;
I’ll drop my burden at His feet,
And bear a song away.”

III

FIERY TRIALS

To those who are passing through severe trials; to those who are tempted to turn away from the Lord and to become disheartened and discouraged, there is an urgent and exhilarating summons in these inspired words: *“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven*

a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." The application of the passage is in the words, "*Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.*" This is needed and enriching counsel. For is there any Christian man or woman who does not have severe testings and who does not find the earthly pil-

grimage difficult? Is there any one who is not tempted at times to doubt the love and nearness of our Father in heaven?

I well recall the time when this verse first became definitely impressed on my own heart. It was during a period of severe trial, and my greatly beloved Mother, in one of her letters (the remembrance of which I treasure as among the greatest blessings of my life), directed my thought to this verse. In many an hour of testing through the years this Divine counsel has renewed my faith and hope.

The sufferings of those directly referred to was after their illumination. That is, their bitter trials came to them after the Gospel of Christ had come to them.

Their suffering was two-fold. First, *their reputations suffered.*

“Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock by reproaches and afflictions.” Some of the Lord’s truest servants have thus suffered. Their reputation has been maligned. Secondly, *their brethren suffered.* Therefore, they themselves suffered. Being true Christians they were interested not only in their own salvation, but also in the salvation of all other followers of Christ.

There is, in the teaching given them, an argument for continuance; a plea that they should be steadfast in their allegiance to Christ; and an admonition that notwithstanding their trials they should go on doing the will of God.

In the light of the context the powerful argument is: Go on, because you have the privilege of entering the immediate presence of Almighty God. When we experience

some bitter disappointment, or some unusual trial or difficulty, surely one reason for not despairing is that we may go at once into the presence of our Lord.

Furthermore, they are shown that the forsaking of Jesus Christ, under any circumstances, is a sin. This, too, is a convincing argument against fainting. The next reason advanced for not losing courage is that they had endured trials in the past and had been delivered. And then there is this final argument: there is a sure reward for all those who do the will of God.

Truly the words, "*Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise,*" are a spiritual tonic. The message they bring is like a refreshing and stimulating breeze from a mountain-top on a hot, sultry day.

These believers were being led to see that having been carried through so many hard places, they should not faint now. That is a part of the Spirit's argument. And it is true that a faith that endures, a faith that persists, a faith that conquers, is God's will for every Christian disciple.

Bunyan, in his immortal "Pilgrim's Progress," refers to the man, "Little Faith." Many of his family still live. "Little Faith" in Bunyan's great classic was not a bad man. He was a good man. He was born and brought up in the town of Sincere. He had a good father and mother. Yet his character was described by his name, "Little Faith."

Possibly it was because he had failed to use the means to strong faith that he remained so weak. We may be sure that if we are weak—

if we lack a vital, growing faith—it is because of something that we have failed to do which we might have done, for it is God's will that our faith shall be strong and triumphant.

I.

The promises that God has given us for the quickening and nourishing of our faith are rich and wonderful. To every believer they are a precious inheritance. In the Scriptures there are literally hundreds of promises to encourage faith. Marvelous things, glorious things, precious things beyond all human understanding, are promised us. To receive by faith even a few of God's promises will bring down the light of heaven upon the earthly path. What peace of heart and what purification of character have come to multitudes through the

exercise of faith in our Lord's promise, "*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out*"! Is any part of the New Testament more amazingly wonderful than this invitation and assurance? There is no one anywhere, no matter how he has sinned against light, who comes in sincere repentance to Christ, but who will have his sins forgiven and receive eternal life.

Or take the promise: "*Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do.*" What marvelous outreaches of attainment and achievement are opened to us if we will but receive these words! As we exercise faith in them, and in other exceeding great promises of our Lord, we truly have need of patience, that, after we have done the will of God, we may have the promises fulfilled in us and through us.

II.

The fulfilment of God's promises to us depends upon our doing His will. "*For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.*" To all the promises, necessary conditions are attached. We ought not to expect the Lord to fulfil His great promises to us if we do not meet His conditions. Each of the promises already quoted has a stipulation annexed. Take the first: "*Him that COMETH to me I will in no wise cast out.*" To have full salvation through Jesus Christ, we must *come* to Him in repentance and faith. Or take the promise, "*Whatsoever ye shall ask IN MY NAME, that will I do.*" We ask in the name of Christ, because of our identification with Him. Or take the third promise: "*Lo, I am with*"

you always, even unto the end of the world." Our Lord's condition of His presence with them was that they go into all the world and preach the Gospel. If we would know the fulness of His power, we must scatter the Gospel seed in every way the Lord may make possible. As we thus obey His will, He will bring His promises to pass.

The full inheritors of the promises are those who go on doing the will of God in the face of all temptations and oppositions. Those who trust Him He strengthens with might by His Spirit so that they do not grow weary of His will, however manifested. To those who follow Him in faith He gives not only a knowledge of His will and strength to do His will, but also love for His will. By His grace He causes them to say:

“Not mine, not mine the choice,
In things or great or small;
Be Thou my Guide, my Guard, my
Strength,
My Wisdom, and my All.”

III.

After doing the will of God patient enduring is necessary. “*Ye have need of patience, that, AFTER YE HAVE DONE THE WILL OF GOD, ye might receive the promise.*” Steadfast endurance is part of God’s will.

Some say that the first step in the Christian life is the most difficult. And there are others who say that the last step is the most difficult. Mark Rutherford said that he had found the intermediate steps the difficult ones because “the intermediate path is unassisted by enthusiasm, and it is here we are so likely to faint.” The beginning, and the end-

ing, and the way in between, are all difficult.

No duty is free from difficulty. Therefore, patience is required. The Rev. H. C. G. McGregor, a British minister who died at thirty-six years of age, was used of the Lord to bring His messages with great power to the Northfield Conferences and to large numbers of people elsewhere. Shortly before his death, a young woman called to speak to him. She said that, four years previously, she had attended his church service and dated her whole Christian life from that day. "God keeps the matter quite hidden from us for four years," said Mr. McGregor, "and then gives us the joy of knowing it. But all the time the blessing was there." Oftentimes in doing the Lord's work we must go on without knowing the blessing that the Lord

is scattering through the work in which we are engaged. Even though we do not see their immediate fulfilment, we are to believe His promises.

Many years ago there was a young boy who greatly desired an education. His mother and sister desired to help him, because he had a brilliant mind, but he said, "No, I must not be dependent on my mother." He had received a Christian training and possessed real Christian faith. He secured a place as a boat hand on a canal. He was determined to make his own living, though he hungered for knowledge. When he was twelve years of age his father died and his way to the securing of an education seemed blocked. His mother and older brother sent for him to come home. They said he should have an educa-

tion and they would work harder to help him secure it. But the brave boy replied that he could not be dependent upon them. "If the Lord means I shall study," he said, "He will open a way Himself." Late one night he was suddenly summoned on deck to give his help while the boat was going through a lock in the canal. While he was uncoiling a rope a kink caught in a notch of the railing and as he pulled to release it, it gave way and he fell backward. Still holding the rope, he tried to climb back to the deck but the rope uncoiled and he sank deeper. Twice he went under. Then, making another effort, he found the rope firm. Reaching the boat he saw that the rope had caught in the same cleft that had caused his peril. This appeared to him providential. The lock being

passed he began to wonder at his deliverance. He began throwing and drawing the rope to see if it would catch again in the same place. But it would not. Then it is said he threw the rope down and said to himself, "Jim, the Lord thinks you are worth saving. He means you shall live and have an education, too. Go home and trust Him." It was the turning-point in his life. Now the world knows him as one of the cleanest and ablest statesmen that the country has had, President James A. Garfield. In his early days he trusted the Lord in spite of all adverse circumstances. He waited patiently. After he had done the will of God, he received the promise. Always the way to inherit the promises is to go on doing the will of God in the face of all temptation and opposition,

Calm endurance under trial is characteristic of the true Christian believer. When days are dark and prayers remain unanswered, the patient Christian keeps on trusting the Lord. He relies steadfastly upon the Lord's love and ability. He places his life at the Lord's disposal. Job's confidence in the love of God was so great that he said: "*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*" A great part of faith's strength is patience.

IV.

But what is patience? It is not laziness or easygoingness. It is not passivity or indifference. To be patient is to go on calmly, cheerfully, submissively, doing the will of God under trial or suffering. "Patience," said Dr. John Owen, "is not a mere endurance of trouble, but it is indeed the due exercise of all

graces under sufferings; nor can any grace be acted in that condition where patience is wanting. The exercise of faith, love and delight in God; the valuation of things eternal above all things of this present life; whereby the soul is kept quiet and composed, free from distractions, fortified against temptations, resolved for perseverance to the end: this is patience." Patience to the Christian is what continuance in the vine is to the branch.

V.

Patient endurance of trial is a part of the Christian disciple's equipment for efficiency. The patient believer gives God a chance to perfect his life and work. As long as we patiently endure we are kept in communion with our Lord, and give Him opportunity to direct our

course. Where there is patient endurance the Spirit of God is in control, for longsuffering is a part of the fruit of His indwelling. Therefore in patient endurance there is efficiency. Those who endure inherit the promises of God.

They are kept in communion with God.

They experience the reality of the presence of Jesus Christ in their lives.

They have abundant answers to their prayers.

The substance of the practical application of this message is: Take a long view of your prayer life. I think Paul must have done that. In the light of nineteen centuries of Christian history how richly his prayers have been answered! The unfolding of God's plans requires

time. Hence the need of patience on the part of every Christian believer.

Patience grows out of the root of faith. Therefore we should continually nourish our faith by exercising the faith we already have, in the light of our knowledge of God's promises. The essential condition for receiving what God has promised is steadfast confidence in Him. *"I waited patiently for the Lord,"* said David, *"and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies."*

Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to usward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."

IV

IRON GATES

ONE of the most graphic and impressive pictures which we have of the early Christian Church is given to us in the twelfth chapter of the Acts. It is a description of the persecution of Christians by Herod. He had killed James. Now Peter was in prison.

I.

The portrayal shows the Church fiercely persecuted. The state was determined to overthrow the Church. The leaders of the Church were to be destroyed. The enemies of the Church struck at the most outstanding personality in the Church. When Herod had taken Peter, *“he put him*

in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people." They took special precautions to make Peter's barrage secure. Two soldiers were kept in the cell with him. To his keepers his hands were chained. Two sentinels guarded the door outside. Sixteen soldiers—four of them on duty for three hours in turn—were assigned to watch Peter. The early Church was at the iron door!

How powerless these first disciples appeared to be. Their Lord was absent. The world was bitterly antagonistic! To those through whom His Church was to be established the Lord had said, "*Without me ye can do nothing.*" And He had gone! They confronted also the

strong bar of their own weakness and insufficiency.

Faith in God is the only effective anxiety-dispeller. Peter slept the sleep of faith. Though sentence of death had been passed upon him he was calm. He had been begotten again *"unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away,"* reserved in heaven for him and for all *"who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* Having this resplendent outlook Peter's heart was untroubled. He believed, as he subsequently wrote, that *"the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers."* Therefore Peter slept.

II.

How did the Church meet the State's relentless opposition? With the weapon of prayer. It was extraordinary prayer. It was persevering, continuous prayer. It was fervent, confident prayer. It was direct, definite prayer: they asked for Peter's deliverance.

How great was the contrast between the apparent strength of the force against the Church and the apparent weakness of the weapon at the Church's disposal! A prayer meeting against a Jewish ruler! Defied by an earthly throne, they turned to the heavenly throne. And their prayers moved heaven to come to their deliverance! Thus through their severe trial they came to know the great power of God. Through the forces that fought against them

their faith was exercised, strengthened, enriched, victorious.

When the deliverance came, the angel came to Peter, and a light shone about him in the prison. *"He smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals, and so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision."* They had gotten by the soldiers. They had passed the guards. Then they came to the "iron gate that leadeth into the city." How true to our own life-experience their experiences were! We pray for a long time for deliverance and help.

We are enabled to overcome many obstacles. Then unexpectedly a greater difficulty than any we have anticipated meets us. Though Peter rejoiced in a partial deliverance he was brought face to face with the iron gate. But the prayers of the Church were continuing unto God for him!

Prayer should not be looked upon as our last extremity, but as the most powerful force at our disposal. It is the Christian's effective resource in every need and perplexity. This truth the early Church had quickly learned. Apart from their prayers the opening of the iron door cannot be explained. The hand that opened that door, though invisible, reached down from the throne of God. Peter's deliverance shows what force there may be in a prayer meeting.

Always divine interpositions are related to the Christian's prayers. Iron gates yield to God's working. Believing prayer is a key that unlocks opposing doors.

III.

By way of the throne of God the Church received all-sufficient help. Through their united and continuous prayer their great deliverance came.

What is our iron gate? Their iron gate was a real gate. All the other hindrances they had safely passed by would not have availed anything if they had not gotten by the iron gate. The record of the opening of the iron gate is for the emboldening of the faith of every Christian believer. The incident testifies to the fact that our Lord is mindful of the needs and dangers of

His children and that He is equal in wisdom and power to all their requirements. What He was in love and might in the dark hours of Peter's imprisonment He is now. Our difficulties, when He deals with them, are like ice overtaken by fierce heat. Our part is to seek, by constant faith, His grace and strength for the doing of His will, assured that as we do so He will fulfil to us His promise never to leave us or forsake us. Whatever trial we are facing, we must look upon it as another opportunity for our Lord to manifest His power in our behalf. Our iron gates are difficulties which overtop all other difficulties we have known.

Such difficulties we have met in the administration of the work of the National Bible Institute. Occasionally a trial comes, which, as we

first meet it, appears to be more formidable than anything we have met before. One such trial we passed through many years ago. We had a good friend. He was a printer. When the Institute work began I turned over to him most of our printing. But no bills came in for the work. I would call him up and say, "That is a very fine job of printing you have done, but where is the bill?" He would say, "Now, Mr. Shelton, you know I want to help you. Why won't you let me do this little thing? Now just let me help the Institute and you please forget the bill." So occasionally we gave him the opportunity he so earnestly requested. He went on doing the printing, and we went on asking for the bills. But the bills did not come. Months passed. He had done this wonderful thing to help

the Institute in its beginnings. He knew how deeply we appreciated what he had done. Suddenly he died, and by his death we lost one of the best friends the Institute ever had. A few weeks after his death I found on my desk a large package, and inside, from the administrators of the estate of our friend, were the bills for all the printing he had done for the Institute, amounting to several thousands of dollars. The Institute was requested to settle the account. There was an iron gate! It was one of the most unexpected and formidable difficulties we had ever faced. But the iron gate opened of itself. When I had explained to the administrators what had occurred, they were kind, made generous concessions and made it possible for the Institute to meet that heavy obligation without

serious embarrassment. Many years have passed since then, and long ago all those bills were settled satisfactorily to the estate, but I shall never forget the shock I had that day when I faced that heavy and wholly unanticipated obligation. By an infinite variety of methods, God can give effect to His will.

In the South Sea Islands John G. Paton had such an experience. One day there were savages carrying torches around the little house in which he lived, with weapons in their hands to destroy him and threatening to set fire to the house. His companion said to him, "Don't go out. If you do, they will kill you." But Dr. Paton answered, "If we stay in here, we will burn to death, for they have set the church on fire and the bamboo hedge is

burning. We will trust God and go out." They stepped out of the little house and those savages threateningly came at them. Suddenly to the south there was a great roaring noise. The savages stopped and listened. "We knew," said Dr. Paton, "and they knew that it was one of those terrific storms that break upon the islands with great damage. They dropped their torches and ran, and we stood there absolutely safe. I do not know, but I believe that was the interruption of my heavenly Father." Dr. Paton was at one of his life's iron gates, and there he found heaven's armies fighting the battles of God's missionary down in the New Hebrides.

How severe and formidable an unexpected difficulty may be to the Christian, even after many reliefs and emancipations have been re-

ceived, the late Sir William Robertson Nicoll must have known, for he said: "So great deliverances come to believers when hope is almost dead, when the doors are so many and so fast, and the enemies so strong and so wakeful, that it seems as if the way were quite closed. The days when we have been rebuffed in every quarter and know not what further we can do! The time when it seems as if every effort has been foiled and there is none other we can make! The day when we catch at the last chance! When we think of one more succour that may be available, of one heart left in the world that may yet pity—and try—and fail. The day when no answer comes to the last imploring appeal, or an answer which is a cold and cruel refusal! We are happy if in such an hour we can still trust

and wait patiently for the interposition of God." To those who do thus patiently trust and obey and wait a hand of help reaches down from the throne of God.

In the state of Maine a group of laymen connected with a Church that was spiritually dead, said (in substance), "What are we going to do with this community? We haven't any influence here, especially. What can we do? We will pray. Let us pick out the wickedest man in all the town, and pray for his conversion." So they selected a drunkard, the vilest man in the community, and centered their prayers on the salvation of that man. Inside of two weeks he was converted and gave up drink, and became a clean, earnest man in the community, and united with the Church. Then they took the next wickedest man and

centered their prayers on him, and so on, and inside of two years, more than two hundred individuals had united with that Church on confession of faith in Jesus Christ. Whether our iron gate may be opposition, or lack of means, or spiritual deadness, God can deal with it, if we trust Him and obey Him.

If we are to have such answers to prayer as these first Christian disciples had, we must have their relationship to the Lord. Peter was in prison for doing the will of God and for preaching the Gospel of Christ. We, too, may expect great answers to prayer if we are in a right relationship to our Lord.

Only those who are within the sphere of God's will have a right to expect His interpositions. Peter was where he was by the will of God. In response to the command of

Christ he had delivered His message. That his faith was strong and unfearing was shown by the steadfastness of his obedience. He had heard and heeded his Lord's order to go to all men with His Gospel and he had accepted his Lord's assurance that He would be with him alway in power. His acceptance by faith of this promise and his fulfilment of the condition adhering to it, gave Peter a strong hold on God and on the transcendant greatness of His power. When God gives a man a commission, He gives Him strength to fulfil it. He can deal with iron doors as readily as with any other hindrance. He brings all His Peters through.

There are some things for us to do even though our Lord is working for us. The angel said to Peter, "Put your clothes on. Dress your-

self. Put sandals on your feet." Peter had something to do. If we would have answers to prayer, we must do a great many things in harmony with God's will, in the way of coöperation with His commands.

Great answers to prayer put a strong obligation upon us to give our testimony to the Lord's loving kindness. Peter, "*beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.*" If we have answers to prayer, there should go along with them a glad testimony to what the Lord has done for us. Peter made his experience count for the glory of God. He said: "*Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren.*"

Is there anything more marvelous than that our lives, if by faith we

are in Christ Jesus, are linked with the throne of God? All our difficulties, even all our iron gates which seem from the human point of view to be absolutely beyond our control, will be overcome as we by faith abide in Him who loved us and gave Himself for us and who ever liveth to make intercession for us.

V

DIRECTED STEPS

GREAT would have been the loss to the world if David had not written about his enemies, his temptations, his desires of heart and his prolonged trials of faith! His experiences, recorded in his autobiographic Psalms, are an enriching mine of guidance and comfort.

One of them—the twenty-fifth—contains teaching for all time. It shows what every man's relation to God should be. It affirms that God, being good and upright, directs sinners how to go. It teaches that those who look to Him may expect a personal, special, definite teaching and leading. The Psalm is a prayer expressing David's desire for two

deep and permanent needs of the soul: teaching and guidance.

There were sharp trials in David's life. He was enmeshed in difficulties. "*Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net.*" He met not only outward embarrassments, but inward disturbances. "*The troubles of my heart are enlarged.*" Furthermore, the nation he loved was afflicted. "*Redeem Israel, O God,*" he cried, "*out of all his troubles.*" It was one of those times when David was hunted like a partridge on the mountains. His need was divine guidance. Therefore he cried to the Lord to show him the way out. "*Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths.*"

I.

Each of us, like David, needs to see clearly God's plan and purpose.

Without a life-plan for us He could not guide us.

For every life He has a perfect plan. Through every life He has a particular object to accomplish. As the captain of a ship knows the course to a designated harbor, so God knows the exact path in which we must walk to accomplish His ends. *"Him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose."*

II.

The Psalmist had confidence in the willingness and competency of God to guide Him. *"Show me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths,"* he prayed. *"Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day."* The foundation of his confidence was the character of God. He never doubted His mercy or

power. He had already known something of the guidance of God. He knew He was one who answered prayer. He recalled his previous experience of the Lord's dealings.

Throughout the Psalm the appeal is to the Lord's compassion and mercy. *"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies."* He was sure that God would help him in his distresses. *"He shall pluck my feet out of the net."* The basis of David's hope was not his own righteousness, but the Lord's mercy. David knew of times in his life when he had been unfaithful to God. But knowing His love and His unchanging mercy, he presents strong arguments to Him: *"Thou art the God of my salvation Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses*

.....According to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O Lord.....Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord.....I wait on thee."

There is efficacy in reasoned prayers. Such prayers reveal eager and intelligent desire. They indicate a knowledge of the character of God. They show an understanding of the way God deals with His people.

Always the Lord in His love, in His mercy, in His compassion and in His faithfulness, is changeless.

With these truths the great Bible characters were familiar. To the Lord Moses said: *"Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And*

he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

Moses needed to know God's plan for Israel, and through prayer it was revealed to him.

How wondrously was the love of God manifested in Jesus' life! And the love of our heavenly Father to Jesus and the love of Jesus to us are identical. *"As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you."*

With assurances and examples of how God loves His people and guides them the Bible is crowded. The life-ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ was planned and guided. He said: *"To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth."* To his self-accusing brothers Joseph said: *"Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did*

send me before you to preserve life."

Joseph looked back over the years and saw that the directing hand of God was in the events of his life.

God called Samuel by name and directed him to his life-work. Paul also had his mission clearly marked out and to its accomplishment he gave all the strength of his Spirit-empowered being. The children of Israel were a marvelous illustration of the willingness of God to guide His people. *"Thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people; and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me."* Moses had a great plan, but he did not know how to carry it out. Lacking wisdom, he asked God to supply it. *"Thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in*

thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence."

The evidence that Moses had found grace in God's sight was the presence of God with him as he journeyed. Having been assured that a supernatural relationship was established between himself and God, Moses expected and secured the divine leadership which his union with God guaranteed.

III.

Attestations of the fact that our Heavenly Father teaches and leads and protects those who trust Him are of frequent occurrence in the

lives of Christian disciples. Such testimonies are so numerous and so emphatic as to encourage every Christian believer to trust God whole-heartedly and continuously.

There is stimulus for such trust in the experience of a Yorkshire minister, who said: "One afternoon in the early autumn, some seven years back, I set out from the village of Sleights for a walk across the moors. When I was half-way up Blue Bank, a hill which links the village and the moorland, a collie dog quietly stepped out from a farmstead and joined himself to me. I am not particularly fond of dogs, and spoke sharply to him: 'Go back! Go away home!' He persisted, however, in accompanying me, and, noticing his decided intention, I took no further notice of him. After walking about two miles into the

heart of the moors, suddenly a powerful-looking man of the tramp class rose out of the heather, and came towards me. I was over a mile away from the nearest dwelling-house. He asked me half a dozen more or less irrelevant questions, casting, I fancied, ominous glances at my watch-chain, to which was attached a valuable gold watch, a present from an old circuit. But the collie stood at attention close by my side, and once gave a low growl. I excused further conversation with the man, remarking that it was time for me to return. Then he began to repeat the usual story that he was unable to find work, and had perforce to resort to begging. I turned and left him, thankful that I had the protection of the collie, which kept with me till within half a mile of the village. Then he suddenly raced

away, and I never saw him again for several months." Truly God often moves in undisclosed ways His wonders to do! His hand, that "wings an angel, guides a sparrow," directs a dog.

He leads some of His servants as He did the late Dr. Theodore L. Cuyler, the widely-beloved pastor of the Lafayette Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn. "When I recall the joys of my forty-four years of public ministry," said Dr. Cuyler, "I often shudder at the fact of how near I came to losing it. For very many months my mind was balancing between the pulpit and the attractions of a legal and political career. A single hour in a village prayer meeting turned the scale. But perhaps behind it all a beloved mother's prayers were moving the mysterious hand that touched the poised bal-

ance and made souls outweigh silver and eternity outweigh time." On this incident, Dr. Cuyler's life-course turned. At the close of the prayer meeting a number of people told him how helpful his words had been. His conclusion in substance was: If a few words of mine in a village prayer meeting have helped so many, what might not I accomplish if I gave my whole life to the preaching of the Gospel?

In South Africa an aged Dutch farmer met David Livingstone, first at Swellendam and then on the banks of the Orange River, near the present site of Kimberley. Dr. Livingstone had eleven ox wagons containing his goods; and as they were being brought across the river he and the farmer conversed and watched the wagons from the river bank. After a silence, Doctor Liv-

ingstone folded his hands, looked up, and repeated (in Dutch) the words: "*Lord, O make me know Thy ways through Thy word and Holy Spirit*"! The aged man said that he had never forgotten the impression this made on him. "Dr. Livingstone," he said, "was a man of God." He had a rich and loving and accessible God! Like Livingstone, every Christian, though he cannot explore Africa, can penetrate to the depths of God's promises. Every Christian can so pray as to receive answers and to have the leading of the Lord.

IV.

There is never a moment when we do not need the guidance of God. One wrong decision may lead to misery and defeat. One wrong step may spoil a life.

How are we to secure God's guidance? How are we to obtain His help in conquering the difficulties and oppositions and temptations which we meet? How are we to go into each new day with the confidence that we are really living under the care of God, as under the care of an all-wise and all-efficient Parent?

It is the *meek* whom He guides. "*The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.*" And who are the meek? They are those who know their ignorance and who wish to be taught. They are those who know how dependent they are upon God and who yield their wills to His will. The quickest way to learn God's mind is to walk with Him in humble obedience. To those who thus walk He shows the way. Through them He

manifests the exceeding greatness of His power.

It is those who fear Him whom He teaches. *"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant."* Those who fear God come to possess "the hidden treasures of the Lord's friendship." When we cannot understand His dealings with us, we can ask Him to interpret them to us and to sustain us in our life of faith.

If we would know the upholding power of His presence, invisible but real, and live and work under His eyes, we must come to Him as did David, in confidence. *"Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee. . . . Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths."* In assurance of faith David ever looked toward the Lord for deliverance, for preservation, for daily

direction. He believed that God was identified with his life and with all who comply with His will. "*All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.*"

The purposes of God touch us at every point of our lives. So to trust Him as to make possible His guidance in *all things* is our great privilege. When our trust is wholly in the Lord we shall look upon the things that men call accidents as God's providences and shall be confident that back of our experiences are heavenly love, thought and planning.

God lives. Those who are in Christ are the children of God. Always His faithful dealings we may experience. Always His promised help we may have. Obstacles and oppositions are but opportunities

for the display of the transcendent greatness of His love and power.

“Happy the man whose hopes rely
On Israel’s God: He made the
sky,
And earth, and seas, with all their
train,
And none shall find His promise
vain.”

In finding God’s plan for our lives and in securing wisdom and power to carry it out, we shall be kept walking by faith. “No contract will be made with you,” said Horace Bushnell, “save that God engages, if you trust Him, to lead you into the best things, all the way through.”

Rowers in a boat do not see the course ahead of them; they see only the way by which they have come. They depend upon the Steersman to take them in the right course.

“Mine eyes,” said David, *“are ever toward the Lord.”* Through bitter, heart-breaking miseries, David had learned to look up to the Lord and to trust Him unfalteringly.

And it is the prerogative of every Christian believer to say with Dean Alford:

“My bark is wafted to the strand
By breath divine:
And on the helm there rests a hand
Other than mine.”

VI

THREE STRONG ALLIES

MORE intently than a sentinel waits for the first streak of daylight, the Psalmist longed for tokens of the presence and power of God. "*My soul,*" he said, "*is toward Jehovah.*" He waited on God with *heart desire* for God's blessings: "*My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.*"

I.

Lack of spiritual power is traceable to a lack of desire for spiritual power. Prayers may be unanswered because they are words merely, and not desires. Heart desire is the first essential in prevailing prayer. The word in the Psalm

is the same word that Jesus used (as recorded in Luke 22:15): “With *desire* I have *desired* to eat this passover with you before I suffer.” In 1830 on the night preceding August 1, the slaves in the West Indian Colonies of Great Britain were to have the freedom promised them. That night tens of thousands gathered in their places of worship, for thanksgiving, where they sang and prayed, and eagerly waited for the dawning of the day on which they were to be set free. They anticipated the morning with great desire.

It was thus that the Psalmist waited upon the Lord: “*My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning.*” Expect something from God and you will receive it. When we come to the Lord in this way, we find that He hears our prayers and grants us

His blessing. In my last conversation with Mrs. Lucy D. Osborn, she spoke about the early days of the Union Missionary Training Institute, the first missionary training institute to be founded. Mrs. Osborn established the Institute with very slender human resources, but she lived to see over two hundred and thirty graduates go to the foreign mission field and over one hundred take up Christian work at home. We were talking about the need for our new Institute buildings, with larger facilities for resident students, and Mrs. Osborn said: "You know, whenever there was a need in the work I always took it to the Lord with the assurance that He would provide the need, *and He always did.*" Mrs. Osborn prayed with intensity of desire, as did the Psalmist: "*If I do not remember thee, let*

my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." Mary Lyon, the founder of Mt. Holyoke College, wrote: "I have a hundred little perplexities and troubles every day, that I should be ashamed to mention even to my mother, but I can take them all to Christ, and never do I carry one of them to Him but He sends me away refreshed and strengthened."

II.

An essential of spiritual strength is patience. "*Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.*" God is described as "*the God of patience.*" The Lord is patient with us. We should be patient with Him.

He is always punctual. All of His purposes are executed at the right moment. The clock of His providence is set unerringly and it never runs too fast or too slow. The blessings we need will come at the right time. Believing this, we shall not be impatient when answers to our prayers are delayed.

The Psalmist saw that he needed patience. Evil doers troubled him. He saw that evil men prosper and that good men have misfortune. This seeming inconsistency he could not explain. In his perplexity he dwelt on the mercy of God. He came to see that when God is given time He sets things right. He trusted Him to deal with his enemies.

The sincere Christian does not need to worry about his enemies. Above all, like Ole Bull, he will not

fight them. When the great violinist visited this country he was persecuted by a number of people. "I am always cheated, and in everlasting trouble," he said. James Gordon Bennett offered him the columns of the New York *Herald* to answer his opposers. But he replied, in his broken English: "I tink, Mr. Bennett, it is best tey writes a g a i n s t me, and I plays against tem." He let his enemies do the writing! He took the marvelous gift that God had given him and used that against them. Any man whose life is right in the sight of God has nothing to fear from enemies. When the enemy comes in like a flood the well-instructed Christian continues waiting upon God for the full length of time He appoints. More powerful is He than any enemy that can arise.

It is through patient waiting on God that the promises are inherited. What was David's testimony? "*I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.*" Paul did not think tribulation too high a price to pay for patience. "*.....We glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience.*" Paul knew that without patience he would not receive the fulfilment of the promises. In this enriching testimony of David are truly significant words: "*Wait patiently for him.*" We should so trust God that His appointments for us will never be disappointments.

If we wait patiently for Him we shall know His will, we shall receive showers of blessing, and we shall experience the delight of answered prayer. As no ship reaches

the desired harbor unless it continues sailing, so prayer must persevere until God grants the answer. He always answers graciously, though not always speedily.

The periods of delayed answers to our prayers afford us an opportunity to bear witness to the steadfastness of our faith. Like the prophet's servant we shall one day see the cloud in the sky if we continue praying.

“Wait patiently the happy hour
 Ordained for thy relief,
For come it surely will with power,
 And change to joy thy grief.
Nay, more, to put to shame thy
 fear,
When looked for least it will ap-
 pear.”

III.

Not only do we need to wait upon the Lord with patience but *“it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.”* That is, if we are to wait upon the Lord effectively, we must be resigned as to what He sends. Every true child of God must taste the bread of sorrow. Therefore, resignation to what is clearly God’s will is essential. Consider Jeremiah: he was mocked, derided, contradicted, persecuted, imprisoned. His fellowmen were his persecutors. *“I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day.”* He hungered and was tempted to despair. Though he was the suffering prophet, he said: *“The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.”* In the twentieth chapter of Jeremiah

is the record of his sufferings. He counted his own afflictions but little in comparison to the afflictions of his people.

Those resigned to God's will will go on calmly in the performance of every duty, desiring and patiently looking for full answers to definite prayers. The three men who were to be put in the fiery furnace resigned their conditions into the hands of God. They said: God *can* deliver us if He *will*. The leper who came to Jesus for healing said: "*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,*" and was told, "*Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*" Trials do not remove Christ or His promises or His indwelling Spirit. To have Christ is to have all. He is our Sun! We can dispense with a few of earth's candle rays. He is the Fountain!

“Be still, my heart! these anxious
cares

To thee are burdens, thorns and
snares;

They cast dishonor on thy Lord,
And contradict His gracious Word;
Brought safely by His hand thus
far,

Why wilt thou now give place to
fear?”

Our Lord Jesus Christ was an example of resignation. In Gethsemane He prayed that the cup should pass from Him, but added, “..... nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” And again, “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.” When Peter took the sword and struck the servant of the high priest, Jesus said, “Put up thy sword

into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Paul was resigned to whatever God's will provided, even though it involved suffering. He says, "*I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.*" "*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*" He was content because he knew that every step of his life was under the constant care of his Heavenly Father. To be calm in trials and distresses is our privilege.

Among the strong incentives to a spirit of resignation are the love of God, the wisdom of God and the faithfulness of God. We are to count on God's love even in our deepest sorrows: "*For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he re-*

ceiveth." Our difficulties are permitted not because God has turned away from us, but because He loves us. In our times of trial we may rely also on His wisdom. *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"*

Whatever in His wisdom God permits is for our good. We may count absolutely on His faithfulness. Peter had many trials, yet in them all he relied on God's faithfulness. *"Wherefore,"* he said, *"let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."*

The need of the world to-day is a larger number of Christians who

can pray with *desire*, with *patience* and with *resignation*, and who through faith can project the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the world. It is possible to pray so that answers will come, for our Lord is always ready to fulfil His promises to those who meet His conditions.

“His very word of grace is strong
As that which built the skies;
The voice that rolls the stars along
Speaks all the promises.

“He said, ‘Let the wide heaven be
spread,’
And heaven was stretched
abroad.
‘Abram, I’ll be thy God,’ He said;
And He was Abram’s God.”

And so our Lord speaks to us directly out of His Word assuring us that if we pray with desire of heart,

with patient persistence and with reliance on His faithfulness, we shall receive the fulfilment of His promises. If we come to Him as Jacob came when he wrestled with the Angel, we, too, shall receive answers to our prayers. God is our surgeon and even our enemies and our afflictions are made to be His instructors for the accomplishment of His purpose in us and through us.

Overshadowed by His love, counseled by His Word, directed by His Spirit, we shall find that all things do work together for good in our lives, as we seek His grace and His wisdom to enable us to live according to His purpose.

“O happy he who sees the threads
Of all that is said and done
By man on earth meet in the hand
Of the Almighty One.”

VII

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

Is the God we worship living? Is He real? What are His characteristics? Can He meet our needs? *“To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not,*

neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Then, as now, people were without real faith in the living God and without confidence that He whom they pretended to worship could meet their need.

To such came the counsel: "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things." The skeptical were advised to look at the stars and at the constellations, at the sun and at the moon, and ask, "Who created all these?"

We, too, have reason to follow this counsel. In March, 1927, the moon passed through the constellation of "Leo the Lion." This particular constellation in its outline suggests a lion, if you have a good imagination. Regulus, one of the stars in the constellation, is approaching the earth at the rate of three hundred and thirty miles a minute. It will require many hundreds of thousands of years before it arrives! It takes ninety-nine years for the light of this particular constellation to reach our earth. The star, Regulus, radiates about two hundred and seventy times more light than our sun! The Lord said, "*Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number.....*" He who created these constellations cares for His children. "*Hast thou*

not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength."

In such assurances we see that the first of all our privileges is to trust God with all our heart. As we do so, let us fortify and guard ourselves by recalling the amazing fact, suggested by Calvin, that "frequently we are more terrified by the empty mask of a single man than we are strengthened by all the promises of God." He bids us, for the reinforcement of our faith, look at the heavens with attention and think upon the love and power of Him who created them.

I.

The renewal of our spiritual strength is a necessity. The Psalmist, even in extremity, believed that the Lord could revive him. *"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me. . . . The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me."* As our spiritual vitality, like his, is subject to decline, we need both the Psalmist's faith and recognition of need of renewal.

Temptations to faint are numerous. Unbelief is sometimes assertive, as it was in God's servants of old. *"Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?"* The world, and Satan, and lukewarm Christians, combine to lessen our spiritual strength. A great deal of the literature of our time is subtly

working against that which makes for faith in Christ. Sordid journalism scatters impurity and sometimes atheism. Even in the pulpit contrary voices are heard. Occasionally ordained ministers question the full integrity of the Gospel message. Many persons in the pews, supposed to be educated, are ignorant of the Bible. A college girl, asked to quote the ten commandments, gave the beatitudes instead.

There is danger also that spiritual strength be lessened by distressing disillusionments which are met by the deceits, the treacheries, the hypocrisies, and the imperfections of professed Christians. Our own sins and mistakes, our sorrows, our disappointments, our responsibilities, and other cares of this world often choke the good seed of the Word and hinder growth of faith.

The failure of the Church to declare the Gospel to all the world indicates the need of spiritual renewal. These and other evidences of spiritual weakness are to be overcome through the replenishing of our spiritual strength. The greater our treasure, the more carefully we should guard it.

The Word of God severely condemns spiritual lukewarmness. A half-dead thing is an awful menace to a living thing. A gardener, pointing out some rose bushes and grapevines, said: "I must get rid of that dead wood and I must get rid also of that half-dead wood, for you know the half-dead wood is constantly stealing away the health that ought to go into the good shoots."

II.

The renewal of our spiritual strength is a glorious possibility.

Spiritual ill health is never a necessity. The way to spiritual reinvigoration is plain: "*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*" It is our strength that shall be renewed—not our weakness.

In three directions, particularly, spiritual renewal is assured: We shall "*mount up with wings.*" This suggests aspiration, vision. The eagle soars higher than any other bird. It will fly for hours with apparent ease at a high elevation. They that wait upon the Lord shall mount up with the eagle to the place where there is vision, where supernatural agencies come into view. When Elisha's servant, in response to Elisha's prayers, had his spirit-

ual strength renewed like the eagle's, he saw allies at work in behalf of his master of which he had never dreamed. *"And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, a host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness*

according to the word of Elisha." The Christian believer, whose spiritual strength is renewed, sees clearly the greatness of the forces that are working in his behalf. He sees how marvelous is the love and the provision of God.

Those who wait upon the Lord shall not only have vision, but they "*shall run.*" This promise suggests enterprise, courage, initiative, and swift working from an inner impulse.

Furthermore, those who are spiritually renewed "*walk, and do not faint.*" This is a guarantee of endurance. Spiritually renewed, we are able to remain steadfast in service in hard places, like the young man in Christian service who was called to a larger field, and who replied: "I have decided to find my larger field in my present opportunity."

Through trust in our Lord, and through obedience to the light which we find in His Word, we may have our spiritual strength continually revived and strengthened. The Holy Spirit is here to quicken and sustain us. *“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”* The use of an earthly father as an illustration of the willingness of our heavenly Father to renew the strength of those who call upon Him, is most appropriate and significant. If human love will grant the request of an earthly child, how much more shall your heavenly Father quicken those who call upon Him?

A great sculptor in Italy, Vincenzo Gemito, was acknowledged to

be one of the leading artists of his time. He was given a commission by King Humbert and Queen Marguerita to make some beautiful things for their palace. The queen desired a silver center-piece for the dinner table. Gemito made a lovely design, and was ready to cast the group in silver. But a few State officials, in opposition to the king and queen, refused to make the necessary grant of money. Gemito went as far as his means would permit but he needed more money in order that he might complete his work. He applied at the office of the treasurer for the money, but it was said that they were not on friendly terms with the king and queen and his application was refused. Day after day, week after week and month after month he received no favorable response. He became so im-

poverished that he was utterly discouraged. For nearly twenty years he was unable to go on with any of his work because of mental unbalance. But his daughter married a young man who was also preparing to do the same kind of work that the great sculptor, her father, had been doing. Knowing how great an artist his father-in-law was, the young man asked him to teach him. So the aged sculptor began to teach his son-in-law. They surrounded the aged man with love and gentleness. Little by little his old time skill came back. Finally, he was able to do as high a quality of work as he did before the great catastrophe twenty years previous. In Italy to-day it is said he is considered the leading sculptor of the nation. His strength has been renewed, through the kindness and love of members of

his own family who recognized the power that was in him, long in abeyance. If, then, a daughter and a son-in-law, being imperfect, knew how to encourage one who had lost hope so that his old time skill came back, how much more shall our heavenly Father renew the strength of those who wait upon Him according to his Word!

III.

The renewal of our strength is assured if we look to God in faith and patiently wait for Him to fulfil His promises. We must believe the promises! We must expect that they will be carried out to the letter! Paul, in a time of extreme trial, voiced his confident expectations: *“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weak-*

ness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." This is the way God has ordained for the renewal of our spiritual life: we are to wait upon Him in faith, in patience, and in eager expectation. "*Abide in me and I in you.....He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."*

It is from the soil of faith that renewed strength and beauty and fruitfulness of Christian character spring! Our part, in order that we may secure the fulfilment of this exceedingly rich promise, is that we continue in believing prayer and in prompt obedience, pleading the promises of God.

And what does it mean to wait upon the Lord? It means that we pray believingly according to His

promises and live obediently according to His commandments. Then we shall find that our strength is being renewed; that our vision is being clarified; that our zeal in service for the Lord is being made constant; and that our ability to stand firm amidst all trials is becoming like the ability of Paul, who said: *"I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me."*

Steadfastly waiting upon the Lord in faith we may receive, through all of life's apparent contradictions, His strength and His guidance, and so become the kind of Christian men and women He intends us to be.

248.86

Sh44g

1755

Shelton, Don Odell
Guidance through life's
contradictions

248.86

Sh44g

1755

Shelton, Don Odell

AUTHOR

Guidance through life's

TITLE

contradictions

DATE DUE


BORROWER'S NAME

FEB 16 1991

Silvia Parsons

ALC893

THE MASTER'S COLLEGE
POWELL LIBRARY
SANTA CLARITA, CA 91321



~~248.86~~

~~5045j~~

1755

X

1755 ✓



THE MASTER'S COLLEGE

248.86 Sh44g

MAIN

Shelton, Don Odell/Guidance through life



3 3540 00003 1022